

Warn children early about smoking's dangers



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The recent report from U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona came to an unsettling conclusion: There is no safe level of secondhand smoke, and even brief exposure can cause harm.

The report raises awareness that parents and schools need to teach children about the dangers of smoking so those children can make informed choices when they become adults, according to the Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program.

Although there are programs at schools and in the community, children need ongoing education about the dangers of smoking and nicotine.

"We are trying to equip kids to be well-informed citizens," said Robert Neese, prevention supervisor for the Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program.

Here are some tips from the county program to help parents teach about those dangers and keep them informed:

Tips for raising tobacco-free kids

More than 5 million children alive today will die prematurely from smoking-related illnesses, and of nearly every adult who smokes, almost 90 percent took his or her first puff at or before the age of 18. Here are some tips for parents to help children stay tobacco-free.

Tips

- **Don't smoke.** Your children are 50 percent more likely to smoke if you do. Don't allow smoking in your home.
- **Your rules about tobacco use must be clear.** Make sure they know that if they break the rules, there are consequences and they will be enforced.
- **Eat dinner together.** This way you hear about their day on the day it happened and you can answer any questions that come up.
- **Know your child's friends.**
- **Know the days they get out of school early and where they are.**
- **Role-play saying no to tobacco.**
- **Discuss the 4,000 chemicals and 40 carcinogens in tobacco.** Relate it to household products. It is OK to be graphic. "Arsenic is what is in rat poison," "Ammonia is what we clean our toilet with," "Formaldehyde is used for embalming people after they die."
- **With your kids visit the Web site www.tobaccofreekids.org.** You can see the latest ads from the tobacco companies. Talk about the type of appeals they're using: glamour, popularity, fun. This site also gives a tally of how much money tobacco companies have spent on advertising this calendar year.

Source: Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program

Ideas for teachers

Here are some ideas for activities teachers can do at school to help kids understand the realities of smoking. The ideas come from the Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program.

What it feels like to have emphysema

This activity will demonstrate what it feels like to have emphysema.

Hand each student one straw and ask them to run in place for approximately one minute. Turn on some upbeat music to encourage them to keep up the pace. After running in place for about one minute, ask the students to stop and breathe only through the straw for as long as they can stand. Ask a couple of volunteers to describe how it feels to breathe through the straws. How would this disease inhibit your daily activities?

Note: It is important that anyone with asthma or other difficulties breathing does not participate in this activity. You may want to delegate him/her to be the timekeeper instead.

Anti-tobacco contests

This activity uses creativity to get an anti-tobacco message across to the community.

Youth can participate in or lead the contests.

Youth can participate in slogan, bumper sticker, poster or mural contests within the community. It might be helpful to create a specific theme for your contest. For example, ask for a message about secondhand smoke. The winner's work can be showcased on T-shirts, stickers, window decals, hats or bookmarks. In a mural contest, judges can choose one design as the winner and the youth advocacy group as a whole can participate in creating the winning mural.

Body maps

This activity is great for younger kids in introducing them to the parts of the body and how tobacco use affects them.

Gather kids in groups of four or five and have them sit on the floor with their group. Unroll one piece of butcher paper or newsprint paper out on the floor in front of each group. Explain that everyone will get a chance to participate and then select one student from each group to lie down on the paper. Have the kids trace around the body of the group member lying on the paper. After the outline is complete, have everyone in the group draw details to the outline highlighting parts of the body that are affected by tobacco use (lungs, teeth, heart, etc.).

You can encourage the kids to draw damaged organs for example, black lungs, yellow teeth, etc. Once everyone is finished, hang the pictures up and have each group share and discuss its drawing.

Program for schools

The news: School administrators and professionals can join the efforts in Maricopa County to educate youth about the dangers of tobacco.

The School-Based Tobacco Use Prevention Funding is available within Maricopa County for 2006-07 school year. Participating districts and charters receive \$2,000 per school toward implementing tobacco prevention and education programs on their campuses.

Who the program targets:

Schools must be located in Maricopa County to be eligible for funds. Target audience is fourth-through eighth-grade students. Technical assistance and ongoing support for the program is provided free of charge.

Background: This program is funded by the Arizona Department of Health Services. The Maricopa County Tobacco Use Prevention Program provides leadership, education and support to all residents, communities and businesses to create tobacco-free environments.

Questions: To register, please contact Elaine Huck at (602) 372-8406 or Jennifer Henry at (602) 372-8427.

For more information, please call (602) 372-7272 or visit mactup.org.